**Note of meeting of the Third Sector Strategy Group (TSSG) – 1 July 2020**

1. **Present:** Raymond Branton, Chair (Family and Community Development), Alan McCloskey (VSGWL), Diane Cameron (WLSEN), James Penman, Minute Taker (VSGWL), Jay Haston (Men Matter/Women Matter), David MacDonald (Whitburn and District CDT), Elizabeth Stevenson (Signpost), Stuart Barrie (Homestart), Silence Chihuri (Fair Justice System for Scotland (FJSS) Group), John Moore (Lothian Community Transport Services), Karen Nailen (Citizens Advice Bureau), Lisa Drinnen (Community Action Blackburn), Helen Davis (West Lothian Youth Action Project), Mark Kennedy (Circle), Errin Anderson (Polbeth Hub), Alice Mitchell (West Lothian Council), Alison Wright (Carers of West Lothian), Angela Moohan (The Larder), Matt Pearce (West Calder and Harburn CDT), Margaret Bryson, Andrew Murray (Safe Families), Dougie Grierson (West Lothian Council), Lisa Drinnen (Community Action Blackburn)

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| **ITEM** | **KEY POINTS** | **ACTION BY** |
|  | **Apologies**  Raymond welcomed Alice and Dougie to the meeting. The main agenda items would be the West Lothian Council Revenue Budget, future funding and the progress of the Working Group.  Apologies – Alan Davidson (The Bridge Community Project), June Dickson (Environmental Health), Jane Deary (Craigshill Good Neighbour Network), Joanna Van Den Berg (Firefly Arts), Dawn Henderson (Families Outside), Tracy Murdoch (Kidzeco). |  |
|  | **Previous minutes & matters arising.**  The action notes were accepted as an accurate account of the previous meeting.  Covid 19 Response Group will be having their first meeting on Thursday 2 July. Progress will be reported back to TSSG.  Alan investigated the possibility of applying to the Emerging Futures Fund but considered that it was not appropriate. Deadline for applications has now passed. WLSEN, with the help of Douglas Westwater, submitted an application to the Emerging Futures Fund. | **Angela, Karen and Joanna** |
|  | **Working group update**  Alice and Dougie gave an update on West Lothian Council activities.  The Benny Higgins report is available in a summarised format. Anyone interested in obtaining this should contact Alice. The Scottish Government will report back on the report to towards the end of July.  Due to Covid 19, West Lothian Council are a bit behind with Community Choices and Participatory Budget but are trying to pick this back up as soon as possible. The Working Group is back up and running and the Council are keen to work in consultation with the sector on the Revenue Budget. Preliminary evidence is showing that unemployment rates have risen along with youth unemployment and will continue to do so in the aftermath of Covid 19.  During these unprecedented times, West Lothian Council and voluntary organisations have had to find ways of working differently to assist local communities. This could be the way forward.  The paper produced by the Working Group was broadly supported. The big issue arising is that the overall budget may be reduced by the need for commissioned work.  There will be a 2-year funding approach which will coincide with the new administration period. At this time applications will reopen for organisations to reapply, but it is not guaranteed that the same organisations will be successful.  Applications should go live in late Autumn with decisions being made by Christmas to allow organisations to plan ahead.  Strategic priorities have changed due to Covid 19, these are being assessed and clear decisions will be made by the end of the summer. The Working Group can feed information from the sector to the council to help reflect on these priorities and on the best way the council and its planning partners can help to deliver them. This will become clearer before the application process begins.  **Main points of Voluntary Organisations budget discussion detailed below.**  Organisations not currently being funded through the budget are able apply.  The council are in discussions about commissioned work for key outcomes and will be involving organisations soon, they are aware that organisations need time for planning. Historically the budget was to help council to reach their outcomes, council are listening to the advice of the working group etc. and are still to decide going forward.  A copy of the paper that was put forward to the council with the amendments made will be made available to members of the TSSG.  Council are working to simplify the application process by making the criteria much clearer than it has been in the past.  The Voluntary Sector have developed many new partnerships during the pandemic and are keen to continue working together with the support from the council. It is acknowledged that good practices have been going on and that the council could harness this going forward.  The Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) draft has been put together and is to be reviewed by Community Planning Partners and Economic Partnership. Once this has been reviewed it will be circulated around the sector. This has been welcomed ahead of the new funding structures.  There are 4 CPP subgroups, which are a recent development, The TSI have a seat on each of these and are happy to relay any comments and views from the sector to these sub-groups. The sub-groups are yet to have their first meetings.  Applications are welcomed from groups working in partnerships, but they will require to identify a lead organisation when applying.  There is lack of real time data coming through regarding the effects of Covid-19 and what the immediate impact is and what things will be like come September. The council are welcoming feedback surrounding this to help create a bigger picture.  Citizen Advice Bureau are launching a dedicated PACE helpline which will be going live over the next few weeks. Partners will be informed about the referrals process soon.  Health and Wellbeing have become a focal point, the council are to start mapping groups surrounding mental health or those who can be utilised in its resolve. These findings will be fed back to the Community Planning Partners.  Funding is due to start in March next year, a lot can change in this time especially surrounding Covid-19.  It was requested that Dougie and Alice attend TSSG meetings on a more regular basis as it has been helpful having them there. The working group will discuss the details around this request, but both are happy to do so.  It was asked if the council will have enough time to prepare for opening the funding bid to the time scale stated. Council have no option but to meet the timescale.  Working group was scheduled to meet again next week but will be rescheduled due to Dougie being on holiday.  Alice and Dougie left the meeting.  There was a request to make updates on the working groups process more readily available and that organisations have the opportunity to feed back to the CPP, so that they are involved in any changes and are at the centre of the economic and social recovery.  It was stressed the importance of getting things right this time round regarding funding of the Voluntary Sector.  Help and training needs to be made available for organisations who are not usually in receipt of funding from the council, to help when applying for funding. The TSI are keen to provide training as some organisations may require help with preparation, support etc. It could prove difficult providing the correct training when council are unsure of exactly what they are looking for regarding funding.  There has been concern over the reduction in funding and whether there will be enough left over to fund organisations not being commissioned by the council. It was also requested that the council not only make clear what they have an interest in funding but also what they don’t want so that organisations can decide whether it is worth their time applying for council funding or whether to go down another route to attract external funding.  It was confirmed that the council are still at the internal discussion stage and that no organisations have been approached about commissioned work.  There is interest in putting together a joint funding bid and splitting the pot between all organisations, but it was suggested that this may be too much work with only 6 months to put this together. There is also interest in smaller scale joint funding bids. It is worth investigating further into a partnership approach to funding to get organisations a greater say on how the funding will be split. Communication is key so that organisations are not left missing out by applying for money to provide the same outcome as another organisation. This is when joint bids may be the answer.  From an inequalities and diversity standpoint, the black community is being significantly marginalized. It was asked how the TSSG can amplify the discussion around the lack of diversity and equality. There is also no BME representation at the council level. Is there anything that BME can do within the TSSG to make sure that their aspirations are being covered. BME aspirations must be acknowledged at all levels. This will be fed back by the working group to council in terms of priorities and criteria so that all voices are herd.  There may not be time to put together joint working applications with only 6 months left to do so and no council outcomes being decided yet. It might be better to take small steps and work towards this for the next funding period.  There will be help made available if needed to help organisations when applying with a joint funding bid.  There is the need to be proactive in telling the council what the sector needs rather than waiting for them to make these decisions. There is an opportunity just now so a need to show the council how best to serve the community and how this can be done as a collective. A decision from the sector needs to be made regarding this, then, if agreed, it should be presented to the council with caution to ensure it does not backfire.  Collaborations are being welcomed by other funders as well, so this is an option to make up the short fall in funding from the council.  It was stressed again that the voluntary sector know what the West Lothian community need and how best to serve them. This information needs to be pulled together and collated to present to the council.  The bottom line is that the money belongs to the council and they can do with it as they please. The sector can lobby and bombard them but at the end of the day they will decide how best to spend their money. It was then rebutted that it was in fact community money and that a change in mind set is needed. The working group are on top of this, but the council move very slowly in making decisions, making this process difficult. It was suggested that a way to harness the drive and determination from the sector was needed in order to find a way to bypass these barriers.  It was asked if the Working Group could present a proposal to the council asking if they would support either one joint funding bid from the sector or many smaller joint bids. Once there are clear outcomes available it will be a lot easier to form partnerships in a bid to fulfil them.  It needs to be identified which organisations are interested in working together as it cannot just be assumed that all organisations will want to be involved. Then it will be identified how these organisations can make the biggest impact possible. Every organisation, small and large need to have an equal say. Other funding sources can be tapped into to maximise funding and this can be done as joint funding bids. |  |
|  | **VSGWL update**  Usual updates from VSGWL were skipped due to lack of time. But VSGWL felt it important to inform organisations that they have had lots of interest, from volunteers, in becoming trustees and to let VSGWL know if any organisation needed anyone to fill these positions. |  |
|  | **WLSEN update**  No update given due to time constraints. |  |
|  | **Organisation updates & misc**  No update due to time constraints. |  |
|  | **Next meeting dates**  Zoom meeting every 2 weeks. Next meeting 15 July. |  |